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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this evaluation is to describe the current level of implementation in the high schools and to document the progress of the 3-year implementation plan of the allocated resources in the Houston Independent School District (Texas). How curriculum changes affected educational programming in the high schools, the characteristics of the first group of students to graduate with the new 24-credit hour requirement, the reactions of administrators to the new requirements, and recommendations from district administrators to enhance program implementation were studied. The implementation influenced scheduling at most HISD high schools, with alternate scheduling models selected as responses to the increase in credits needed for graduation. Teacher shortages in some areas and a lack of science laboratories and technology centers have resulted from the implementation. Principals considered finding teachers for the new required courses as their number one priority under the new program. A sample group of ninth graders was identified to provide baseline information on the first group of students who will graduate under the new requirements. Recommendations center on increasing the number of contact hours students must attend in addition to increasing the credit hours they must earn and evaluating the effects of innovative scheduling on student learning. Additional communication and staff training are also recommended. Appendixes list the schools, contain the administrator interview for the study, show laboratory completion schedules, and describe student demographics. (SLD)

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ED 428 163

RESEARCH

Report on an Educational Program

Department of Research and Accountability

Core Curriculum

1996–97

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Houston Independent School District

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Executive Summary
Core Curriculum
1996–97

Program Description

Within the Houston Independent School District (HISD), Core Curriculum has been defined as a unified approach to education. A primary goal of the Core Curriculum has been to upgrade the quality of education for students to better prepare them to meet the challenges of the 21st century. In April 1995, the HISD Board of Education accepted revisions to the board policy relating to the graduation standards of all students in the district. Graduation requirements for earning a high school diploma from an HISD school were extended from a twenty-one credit program to a twenty-four credit program. The type of credit hours was also defined to include an increase in the number of science credits from two to three credit hours and in the number of social studies credits from three to four, which included World Geography. Additionally, students were required to take a one-credit course in computer competency as well as a course in a second language. The number of required elective hours decreased from seven to five and a half credits. Students who entered the ninth grade in the fall of 1995 were the first class to follow Core Curriculum.

The Curriculum Department was given the responsibility for monitoring the implementation efforts over the three-year transition period. In order to implement the changes in the curriculum, additional resources were needed at most of the high school campuses. For the 1996–97 school year, $3.4 million was allocated with approximately $2.6 million devoted to the construction of science and technology laboratories and $1.4 million was for additional staff.

Purpose of the Evaluation Report

The purpose of this evaluation is to describe the current level of implementation in the high schools and to document the progress of the three-year implementation plan of the allocated resources. The following evaluation questions were addressed:

1. How have the changes in the curriculum affected educational programming for the high schools?
2. What were the characteristics of students in the first group graduating with 24-credit hours?
3. What were the administrators' reactions to the increased standards?
4. What recommendations were made by district administrators to enhance the implementation of the high school Core Curriculum?

Findings

- The response to the increase in the number of credits needed for graduation within the same amount of time affected site-based scheduling decisions in most of the HISD high schools. New scheduling models ranged from the alternate block with 90 minute classes to the accelerated schedule in which courses are taken in 9-weeks.

- Alternate scheduling was selected as a response to the increase in credits needed for graduation. This has resulted in a reduced number of total contact hours student spend in the course.

- Scheduling models have affected the process of gradual implementation, because the model assumed that students would take certain classes in a particular order, using the traditional schedule. The outcome has resulted in teacher shortages in required subjects and crowded science labs.

- Student progress toward graduation will be negatively affected if the science labs and technology centers are not operational during 1997–98. As of July, the science labs scheduled for completion during the 1996–97 school year were ready, but construction stopped due to lack of funds. The computer labs had computers and by August most were operational as scheduled. Lab personnel were uncertain about who was to do the installation, so time was spent in getting answers. Internet access was not included in the original cost estimates.

- There seemed to be confusion about the new graduation requirements in terms of how they affected students and when the 24-credit diploma went into effect. There were dissimilar answers as to students' graduation date using the new 24-credit plan reflecting a mixture of what was expected and what was considered ideal.

- Due to innovative scheduling plans as well as the change in diploma requirements, an effective scheduling tool and monitoring software are needed. Counselors and registrars reported the additional time they spent due to problems with Schools Administrative Student Information (SASI). Both groups reported using the computer and then another written document as a back up system. Operations are completed by the professional staff, limiting time spent with the students.

- Principals rated hiring teachers and staffing the new required courses as their number one priority. Principals described staffing in much the same way with a combination of using existing faculty and hiring for specific course needs. For the additional science credit, faculty science teachers were generally given another higher level course or asked to teach an additional course. The additional Speech course was generally taught by a teacher with a major in another subject. The computer and foreign language courses usually required hiring specialized staff.

- Creative programming has offered a way of meeting the requirements and staffing the courses. Courses like American Sign Language and Math of Money fulfill the requirements.

- The majority of counselors interviewed commented on the amount of paperwork scheduling required. The new computer system was cited as requiring more time in assisting students to get the courses required for graduation.

- For the purpose of evaluation, a sample group of students was selected as representative of the district. During the 1996–97 school year, 1,279 students from a representative sample of HISD students in the middle school population entered ninth grade in their zoned feeder high schools of Austin, Houston, Jones, Lamar or Lee. Of those, 3% were Asian, 10% African American, 67% Hispanic, and 20% white.

- Of the 1,219 students who did not attend either the magnet or zoned high schools, 108 were retained and attended district middle schools and 945 students were enrolled in other high schools, with 160 students had not dropped out, but were no longer enrolled in HISD.

- About 26% of the students in the ninth grade sample population were eligible for free/reduced priced lunch compared to the district total of 60% for students on the high school level.

- Almost half (49%) of the eighth graders from the selected sample chose to attend other HISD high schools in ninth grade. More of the Hispanic students attended their zoned high school than the other ethnic groups in the sample.

Recommendations

1. In keeping with the intent of increasing graduation requirements, consideration should be given to adding to the number of contact hours students are required to attend in order to earn the diploma. The increase in credits has reduced the number of contact hours students spend in the course.

2. Innovative scheduling such as accelerated and alternate block present an opportunity to compare the effectiveness of different schedules on student learning. The effects of course scheduling should be studied in terms of student progress.

3. Increase the communication opportunities between the schools and the central office.

4. Clarify the computer installation process and consider additional financing for Internet access.

5. In one document, clarify the requirements of earning the general diploma including specific examples of typical problem areas.

6. Improve the SASI tracking procedures and database collection for following the progress of students throughout the educational process.

7. Consider options such as the use of satellite and video conferencing for using existing staff to teach the new required courses.

Core Curriculum
1996–97

Purpose: *Review the program and document the progress of implementation.*

Design: *Descriptive, process evaluation.*

Population: *A cohort of ninth grade students from five HISD high schools. Administrators from 23 HISD high schools.*

Methods: *Interview/surveys of the school administrators with qualitative and quantitative descriptions including a student sample.*

Findings: *The increase in the number of credits needed for graduation within the same amount of student contact-time affected scheduling in most of the HISD high schools. The scheduling models have affected the process of gradual implementation, because the model assumed that the class of 1995–96 would take certain classes in a particular order using the traditional schedule. The outcome has meant a shortage of teachers in required subject areas as well as crowded lab facilities. Student progress in terms of graduation will be negatively affected if the science labs and technology centers are not operational for classes beginning the fall semester of 1997. Principals rated hiring teachers and staffing the new required courses as their number one priority. A sample of students from the first class expected to graduate was described. Of those students, 1,279 entered the zoned high school as ninth graders during 1996–97.*

Conclusions: *Consideration should be given to adding to the number of contact hours students are required to attend in order to earn a diploma. The effects of different schedules should be studied. In one document, clarify the polity and graduation requirements needed to earn a diploma from HISD. Improve timely student tracking procedures and database collection for following the progress of students throughout the educational process. Consider options for using existing staff to teach the new required courses like the use of satellite and video conferencing.*

Introduction

Program Description

Within the Houston Independent School District (HISD), Core Curriculum has been defined as a unified approach to education. A primary goal of the Core Curriculum has been to upgrade the quality of education for students to better prepare them to meet the challenges of the 21st century. In April 1995, the HISD Board of Education accepted revisions to the board policy relating to the graduation standards of all students in the district. Graduation requirements for earning a high school diploma from an HISD school were extended from a twenty-one credit program to a twenty-four credit program. The type of credit hours was also defined to include an increase in the number of science credits from two to three credit hours and in the number of social studies credits from three to four which included World Geography. Additionally, students were required to take a one-credit course in computer competency as well as a course in a second language. The number of required elective hours decreased from seven to five and a half credits. Students who entered the ninth grade in the fall of 1995 were the first class to follow the revised Core Curriculum. For students entering ninth grade in the fall of 1996, the state of Texas added a requirement of one half-credit in Speech, which further reduced the number of elective credits.

Program History

In February 1995, a proposal for a revised core curriculum for high school students was submitted for

review by the HISD school board. On April 7, 1995, the proposed changes were accepted. As part of the implementation plan, a Core Curriculum Ad Hoc Committee was appointed and charged to review the proposed changes in the basic diploma and to review the twenty-four-credit recommended program for formal adoption. Funding was allocated to upgrade science and technology by providing more laboratory space and equipping the laboratories. In January 1996, under the direction of the HISD Superintendent, a select group of administrators met as a Core Curriculum Task Force to address several implementation issues. The primary goal of the task force was to create action plans complete with time lines in the areas of allocating course resources, reviewing instructional time, addressing teacher issues and recommending directions regarding areas of specialization. By October 1996, work on the physical plants had begun. The modifications in the physical plant were assigned to a three-year cycle for completion of the science and technology labs. In January 1997, the HISD Board of Trustees formally approved new graduation requirements effective, in 1997–98 for all students entering the ninth grade for the first time.

Program Personnel and Funding

The Curriculum Department was given the responsibility for monitoring the implementation efforts in the Core Curriculum over the three-year transition period. In order to implement the changes in the curriculum, additional resources were needed at each of the high school campuses. Funding was allocated for the transition over a three-year plan. For the 1996–97 school year, $3.4 million was allocated with approximately $2.6 million devoted to the construction and installation of science and technology laboratories and $1.4 million available for additional staff.

Purpose of the Evaluation Report

The purpose of this evaluation is to describe the current level of implementation of the Core Curriculum in the high schools and to document the progress of the three-year implementation plan. The following questions were addressed:

1. How have the changes in the curriculum affected educational programming for the high schools?
2. What were the characteristics of students in the first group graduating with 24-credit hours?
3. What were the administrators' reactions to the increased standards?
4. What recommendations were made by district administrators to enhance the implementation of the high school Core Curriculum?

Methods

Data Collection and Analysis

Information regarding the Core Curriculum program was collected through interviews with the program coordinators, site visits to high school campuses and interviews with the key personnel at the campus level. Demographic information on the cohort of students who entered ninth grade during the 1996–97 school year was collected using HISD databases. Information used to compare the sample population with the district was taken from the *District & School Profiles* (1997). Academic performance was measured by the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), a state-wide criterion-referenced test. The source for information on the dropout rate came from the Texas Education Agency (TEA). A structured interview was developed to gather information regarding program perceptions of the school administrators. This was conducted both on the high school campus and by telephone. Descriptive statistics were used in the analysis of the demographic and enrollment data.

Participants

A sample of students was selected as a representative cohort of students from the 1996–97 school year. The students attended either Revere, Edison, Lanier, Burbank or Hartman middle schools during 1995–96. During 1996–97, this group entered Lee, Austin, Lamar, Houston or Jones high schools.

A structured interview was designed to determine administrators' perceptions of the changes in the core curriculum on their campus. Out of the 30 HISD high schools, administrators at 23 high schools were contacted. In order to understand the complexity of the issues, a variety of administrators were interviewed, including 5 principals, 4 instructional deans, 3 registrars and 12 counselors. Out of the 23 schools that were contacted, personnel from 16 high schools throughout HISD responded to the interview/survey. See Appendix A for the participating schools.

Results

How have the changes in the curriculum affected educational programming for the high schools?

District documents and results from the Core

Curriculum 1997 Administrator Interview/Survey were used to determine the current status of the curricular changes (see Appendix B). Educational programming and course offerings have were affected by several issues including physical conditions, teacher staffing assistance, scheduling and student interest/success.

Physical Needs

At the onset of the project, it was recognized that to implement the curriculum revisions, physical needs would require the following additional resources above the normal allocations. The fiscal time line was proposed and accepted by the school board in April 1995 for gradual implementation of the needed facilities.

- Science laboratories to accommodate the ninth graders when they become juniors.
- More computer work stations complete with software and network capability.
- Social studies classrooms equipped with software, maps and materials to teach world geography courses.
- Foreign language listening stations, tapes and materials.

In terms of materials, time, personnel and training the following needs were cited:

- Teachers needed additional resources, materials and staff development toward managing instructional time particularly in relation to schedule changes incurred by block scheduling.
- Counselors needed additional time and personnel to assist, schedule and counsel students. The other recommendations involved the re-allocation of resources within each campus.

The following are the cost projections recommended for completion by the 1997–98 school year:

- Constructing 41 science labs at a cost of approximately $175,000 each.
- Assembling 58 computer labs, of which 37 for career and technology would cost $55,000 each and 21 for computer science would cost approximately $100,000 each for a total cost of $4,290,000.
- Buying 52 sets of foreign language and 68 sets of geography materials costing $800 each.

According to the Science Labs Improvement Program Schedule (Appendix C), 9 schools were targeted to have new labs completed by the Fall of 1997. As of July 1997, 11 schools reported having the science lab revisions completed, indicating that the building phase is operating ahead of schedule.

The technology hardware and installation plan was scheduled to proceed at approximately the same pace. Survey respondents from about half of the schools reported receiving the equipment but were unable to use it due to network connection problems.

The following reflects a typical statement,

"We need more wiring and more computers in order to provide for the required classes and accommodate the number of students we are teaching in the classrooms now."

Teacher Staffing Assistance

It was also recommended that revenues be devoted to hiring additional teaching personnel based on the standard staff allocation formulas found in the *School Allocations Handbook.*

Of those who responded to the question on the interview survey, the majority reported that they received some additional funding, but that it was not enough to pay a full-time teacher. Administrators summed up the group consensus with the following comments.

> The new subjects have allowed us to hire more teachers. We were able to hire .83 of a teacher for World Geography, so the full-time teacher had to be funded with additional money.

> We don't have enough teachers to support the proposed changes in the curriculum, based on the enrollment figures. Right now the number of teachers is tied to the enrollment with something like 1 teacher to 75 students ratio. Requiring more students to take a foreign language means adding more teachers qualified to teach the course. So far, no additional funding has been devoted to making the adjustment.

> We need foreign language teachers who can discipline and teach our students. They are in such demand that they get more money and they just transfer out...

Course Offerings

For the college-bound student, the additions to curriculum have meant few changes or modifications

in the courses taken. The requirements have affected students who might not want to take the third year course offering in science (e.g. Biology 2), may not have the skills for Calculus and/or might not be interested in learning a foreign language. Courses have been developed to accommodate the skills of the students and the interest level. The following comments reflect some of the curriculum decisions.

> It is all related to funding. The district needs to help the schools in offering the 24 credits as courses in the curriculum. We can't afford to hire teachers using the usual 75 student to one teacher ratio.

> We offer other courses like American Sign Language instead of Spanish for students as a foreign language. We offer Chemistry in the Community for students who are weaker in Math but still need a science credit. Even if the student is not presently college bound, this course will count toward college admission. We now offer more courses. We also use Math of Money for the pre-algebra course.

Scheduling Issues

The alternate block schedule was mentioned most often. The following comments are representative of those using this scheduling system.

> We went to the alternate block schedule when the changes in the curriculum went into effect. We were thinking of going to the 24 credits but this pushed us over.

Many talked about using the alternate block but making modifications.

> We have used an alternate block schedule for the past two years. Its working with modifications as needed. For example, we had to put Language Arts every day and back to back for the ninth graders.

> We are trying to give ninth graders Math everyday. I don't know how we will do it, and fit it into the master schedule, but we will.

> With the block system, students get an extra two and a half credits, so they can use them for electives or to double up on the required courses. For example, a junior could take all the English courses needed back-to-back. Many opt to get their requirements completed sooner.

> We have been on an alternate block schedule for 2 years. This year we are modifying it. Instead of 4 classes that are offered on an alternate block schedule we will have 3 classes every other day and 2 classes every day. We are doing this because of athletics and band. The instructors have insisted that they see their students on a daily basis during the season.

Accelerated scheduling was described as very effective in two of the high schools. The expectations or problems were also discussed.

> We have been on an accelerated block schedule for 2 years now. We have 4 classes that meet every day 90 minutes for 18 weeks. The problems we have had with our accelerated block involved credits for students in band and athletics. Students in athletics have to take fourth period, but the student usually has completed the required number of credits within 2 years, so the rest of the time he/she earns local credit [which does not count toward the 24 credits required]. This credit problem usually does not affect marginal students because they are not in the athletic or band programs.

Principals in two of the schools reported using traditional scheduling and offered reasons for their choice. In both cases they cited student mastery as concerns against going to the other scheduling systems.

> We have not gone to a block schedule. I do not agree with the block scheduling concept. We still have a seven period day. I am not sure that some subjects like Calculus can be taught in 9 weeks as some are doing with the accelerated block. Kids today have no tenacity. They need to learn perseverance. They need to learn that it takes time and continual work to make something happen.

Student Interest/Success

Administrators discussed their perceptions of the how the graduation requirements affected students. Most of their comments reflected a positive view.

> We have noticed that fewer students go

to summer school. The counselors are seeing fewer ninth grade repeats this year.

We didn't expect to see many changes in terms of the students until next year. However, this was the first year that some of the students graduated within three calendar years. They could do that, because they earned enough credits, which at this point is still 21 credits.

We have seen some positive effects already. The school within a school plan is in its third year. Kids have shown a greater commitment to school. We are an inner city school, that went from a 42% dropout rate to 21% in three years.

The increased requirements will begin to affect the next graduating class in 1997–98. I don't know what the overall effects will be once all the changes are in place. The marginal students take most of the counselor's time during their senior year. We find courses so they get enough credits to graduate.

What were the characteristics of students in the first group graduating with 24-credit hours?

Demographic information on the selected sample of students included the number of students, gender, ethnicity and economic status. Economic status was reflected by the number qualifying for free/reduced lunch. During the 1995–96 school year, a total of 2,498 students were enrolled in either Revere, Edison, Lanier, Burbank or Hartman middle schools as eighth grade students. The following tables illustrate demographic information and previous academic performance about the selected cohort of students. **Table 1** provides demographic information on the entire student population.

Of the 2,498 eighth grade students in the sample population, 3% were Asian, 18% African American, 62% Hispanic, and 17% white, compared to the overall middle school population, of which 3% are Asian, 34% African American, 53% Hispanic and 10% white. During the 1996–97 school year, 1,279 students from the original cohort entered ninth grade in the zoned feeder high schools of Austin, Houston, Jones, Lamar or Lee. Of those, 3% were Asian, 10% African American, 67% Hispanic, and 20% were white.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics for Student Sample During 1995–96 and 1996–97

	1995–96		1996–97	
	n	%	n	%
Enrollment	2,498	100	1,279	100
Ethnicity				
Asian	74	3	35	3
African American	456	18	125	10
Hispanic	1549	62	858	67
White	419	17	261	20
Gender				
Female	1,232	49	634	50
Male	1,266	51	645	50
Economic Indicator				
Free/Reduced Lunch	1,216	49	333	26
Special Programs				
Limited English Proficient	564	23	311	24
Special Education	236	9	137	11

The sample was fairly reflective of the district's 1996–97 overall high school population, of which 3% were Asian, 36% African American, 48% Hispanic and 12% were white.

During the eighth grade, there were slightly more males (51%) than females included in the sample. In the ninth grade, at the regular high school, the group was evenly distributed with almost the same number of males as females.

Using free or reduced lunch as an indicator, 49% of the eighth grade students in the sample were eligible for free/reduced priced lunch compared to the district total of 60% for students on the middle school level. In ninth grade the percentage decreased somewhat to 26% of the students in the ninth grade sample population.

When looking at the difference between the students from 1995–96 to the 1996–97 school year, one of the most striking changes were in the number of students who moved from the eighth grade to their zoned high school. Almost half (49%) of the eighth graders chose to attend other high schools. The demographic information of these students by school can be found in Appendix D. Also illustrated in Table 1 is the demographic composition of the group as ninth graders. With slightly over half to the original number of eighth grade students, more of the Hispanic students attended the feeder pattern high school than the other ethnic groups represented in the sample population.

The information in **Table 2** illustrates the end of

year status of the students in the sample cohort or group of students. During the 1996–97 school year, the majority (78%) of students were promoted, matching with the 80.5% district total for middle school

Table 2: Status of Students in Sample in May 1996

	1995–96		1996–97	
	n	%	n	%
End of year Status	2,498	100	na	na
Promoted	1,958	78	na	na
Retained	108	5	na	na
Placed	241	9	na	na
No Status	160	6	na	na
Dropout	31	1	na	na

students. Another 9% were placed in the ninth grade. However, the 1% drop out rate was slightly lower than districtwide total for middle school students of 1.3%. At the time of this report, the end of year status report was unavailable. Of the 1,219 students who did not attend either the magnet or zoned high schools, 108 were retained and attended district middle schools and 945 students were enrolled in other high schools, with an additional 160 students who had not dropped out, but were no longer enrolled in HISD.

The TAAS test performance of students in the sample cohort is presented in **Table 3**.

At 70%, a higher percentage of the sampled students passed the Reading subtest on the eighth grade TAAS than the districtwide average of 61%. On

Table 3: Student Performance on the Eighth Grade TAAS During Spring 1996

Subtests	n taking	% Passing*
Reading	672	70.4
Math	588	61.2
Writing	551	58.2
Passing All Parts	423	44.0

the Math subtest, the 61% passing was higher that the districtwide average of 41%. However, the 58% passing the Writing subtest was slightly lower than the districtwide performance of 60%.

Thirty-seven percent or 946 students from the 2,498 students selected in the original group took the TAAS, and of those, less than half (44%) passed all the sections of the test.

What are the administrators' reactions to the increased standards?

As one administrator pointed out,

> The number of credits needed for a student to graduate are up everywhere in the city and state. If HISD did not raise their requirements to meet the others, it would seem that students failed because we expect less of them. With these changes, we are keeping pace with others are doing.

The following responses are based on comments made by the respondents to the interview/survey. They are grouped by position in the organization and reflect the orientation from each perspective.

Principals

Funding and staffing were the primary implementation issues. The following is an example.

> We are having problems finding courses for the students and people to teach them.
>
> I am looking for people with multiple certificates. I want them certified not teaching their minor areas.

Academic Deans/Curriculum Planners

Courses and scheduling were the major focus.

> We went to the alternate block schedule when the changes in the curriculum went into effect. We were thinking of going to the 24 credits but this pushed us over.
>
> We need extra technology. We need more wiring and more computers in order to provide for the required classes and have the number we have in the classrooms now.
>
> We are looking into offering the advanced science and technology courses using distance learning. Then the teachers we have can monitor the students in the room. The teachers will be the class facilitators.

Counselors

The confusion about specific applications involving the Core Curriculum implementation and scheduling were their primary concerns. The counselors appeared to have implementation problems related to specific daily interactions with students. These included a lack of clarity about the guidelines and scheduling. There was confusion about the applicability of the new requirements to special student cases. One example offered was of a student who

started high school as a ninth grader in the fall of 1993, but due to personal problems dropped out for one year and then re-enrolled in another HISD school. This student is expected to graduate in class of 1999, but some of the counselors seemed unsure of what credit-hour requirement should be applied to that student.

> The accelerated block has been a scheduling nightmare, because every 9 weeks the schedule changes.
>
> It now takes us [counselors] a whole week to schedule students into their courses. Between the paperwork and the computer, scheduling students has become the biggest part of the counselor's job on this campus.
>
> The new courses help us in directing students toward three areas of specialization. The electives assist in career choices.

The lack of clarity became apparent from the dissimilar answers as to what year students are expected to graduate using the new 24-credit plan and included a range of answers reflecting a mixture of what was expected and what was considered ideal.

Registrars

Paperwork and future consequences on the number of graduates were their major concerns.

> With SASI and the curriculum changes, the paperwork has doubled, because we keep a double set of records on each student. We do it because the district requires a hard copy. I would rather keep the records on the computer, but keeping both takes time.
>
> With the mobility rate in our school and in the district, I see a real problem in keeping up with the students and their credits.
>
> This may add to the drop-out problem, because the students just lose heart when they can't get enough credits as it is.

What recommendations were made by district administrators to enhance the implementation of the high school Core Curriculum?

School administrators had these suggestions:

1. Research the effect of the scheduling changes.

   We need to see the effect the alternative day block has on students' end of course grades. Right now we use the number of students who successfully complete the Advanced Placement (AP) tests as an indicator of student success.

2. Provide students with a real and practical incentive for staying in school.

   Student failure on the basis of class attendance is the real problem. Getting enough credits to graduate is not the problem that students are having in terms of graduation. Students should be exempted from taking the final exam based on class attendance and class participation scores.

3. Clarify the graduation requirements for students and the entry date on which the new standards apply.

   We have students that entered our school with the class of 1993–94, but will not graduate until the class of 1999. Do they go by the 21 credits to earn a diploma or will they need 24 credits like the other students who will graduate at that time? What happens to students who re-enroll in school after staying out for a semester or even one year?

4. Integrate the instructional teams and the learning matter and confine students to a limited area in which all the subjects are taught in a real world context.

   Only in school has subject matter been isolated. In real life, I am expected to integrate my skills. That is what we should teach and how we should teach students. We use cross-curricular teaching teams made up of 2 English teachers, 2 foreign language teachers and 2 science/math teachers who meet daily and integrate subjects into the specialized career areas.

5. Notify students about the changes in the requirements and involve them in the process of selecting more rigorous course options.

   We need to tell kids in advance what to expect. We spent a year announcing the change in scheduling. Kids are like us, if we say it they believe it. We are going to begin selling the 24 credits to the students this fall, so maybe they will be ready for the additional credits.

Discussion

This report offers baseline information on the implementation efforts of the district and traces the progress of the first class of students affected by the new graduation requirements.

According to the administrators interviewed, the primary issue at this point has been one of providing the necessary resources to make the changes possible in time for the students to graduate. The perceptions of the curriculum changes were colored by the job functions of the administrators. The school counselors were most concerned by the students' class schedules and the number of courses in each subject required for graduation. The registrars noted the number of courses, credits and the plan being determined by the entry date. Registrars predicted future problems with the district's mobile population. The academic deans and those who dealt with the courses offered on the Master Schedule were most concerned with how students could fill the requirements as well as how the choices could be offered within the scheduling plan. Principals talked of the funding in relation to hiring teachers and the use of faculty in covering the courses. They also addressed the scheduling issues and how their school fit the course offerings into the instructional day.

A sample cohort of students entering the ninth grade in 1996–97 was selected based on the eighth grade promotion file. The goal was to trace the progress of these students through ninth grade year in their feeder pattern high schools. A description of the group using demographic and characteristic variables was possible but the end of year status report was not available. The purpose of the Schools Administrative Student Information (SASI) was to provide information in a timely manner and yet, the data on the end of spring term status of students was unavailable at the time of this report (August 1997). The most significant finding about the student population was the number of students who elected to attend high schools other than the one they were zoned to attend. Further study may determine the cause for the change in student attendance pattern.

Counselors and registrars mentioned the difficulties caused by or intensified by the computer system. Comments were made about the additional time needed to schedule students and track progress due to the problems encountered with SASI. Particularly for the counselors, the lack of trained personnel and available support added to the work load rather than decreased it. By adding to the time spent on the computer, the length of time between a student request and a completed transaction has increased rather than become more efficient.

The majority of responding administrators were positive about the enhanced general diploma requirements and noted the computer and technology requirements as most needed in the future. What the personnel responding from the schools reflected was that they needed more feedback on the results of actions taken toward accomplishing the goals. This particularly referred to the effect of the schedule changes on the student learning.

Recommendations

1. In keeping with the intent of increasing graduation requirements, consideration should be given to adding to the number of contact hours students are required to attend in order to earn the diploma. The increase in credits has reduced the number of contact hours students spend in the course.

2. Innovative scheduling such as accelerated and alternate block present an opportunity to compare the effectiveness of different schedules on student learning. The effects of course scheduling should be studied in terms of student progress.

3. Increase the communication opportunities between the schools and the central office.

4. Clarify the computer installation process and consider additional financing for Internet access.

5. In one document, clarify the requirements of earning the general diploma including specific examples of typical problem areas.

6. Improve the SASI tracking procedures and database collection for following the progress of students throughout the educational process.

7. Consider options such as the use of satellite and video conferencing for using existing staff to teach the new required courses.

Appendix A
List of HISD High Schools
Administrator Interview/Survey
Appointments

	School	District
1.	Austin	East
2.	Bellaire	South West
3.	Davis	North Central
4.	Furr	East
5.	Houston	North
6.	Jones	South Central
7.	Kashmere	North East
8.	Lamar	Central
9.	Lee	West
10.	Madison	South
11.	Milby	South East
12.	Reagan	North Central
13.	Scarborough	North West
14.	Sharpstown	West
15.	Sterling	South
16.	Waltrip	North West
17.	Washington	North West
18.	Westbury	South West
19.	Wheatley	North East
20.	Worthing	South
21.	Contemporary Learning Center	Alternative
22.	DeBakey High School of Health Professions	Alternative
23	B Jordan High School for Careers	Alternative

APPENDIX B

Core Curriculum
ADMINISTRATOR INTERVIEW

Date

SCHOOL NAME PRINCIPAL (Person Interviewed) Phone

1. What do you see as the major effects of the change in graduation requirements?

2. How has the change in graduation requirements affected the composition of the faculty?

3. How has the change in graduation requirements affected course offerings?

4. How has the change in graduation requirements affected the schedule of classes?

5. When do you expect to see the results of the changes in terms of the students?

6. What additional material support is needed for successful implementation?

APPENDIX C

LABORATORY COMPLETION SCHEDULES

Technology Laboratory Schedule

School Name	Management District	Labs Planned	Ready 8/97
Science Labs			
Austin	East	2	Yes
Bellaire	South West	1	Yes
Contemporary Learning Center	Alternative	1	NA
Davis	North Central	3	Yes
Furr	East	2	Yes
Houston	North	2	Yes
Jones	South Central	1	NA
Jordan	Alternative	1	NA
Kashmere	North East	1	NA
Lamar	Central	1	NA
Lee	West	1	Yes
Madison	South	2	Yes
Milby	South East	3	No
Reagan	North Central	2	No
Sharpstown	West	2	NA
Sterling	South	1	NA
Westbury	South West	2	NA
Wheatley	North East	1	NA
Worthing	South	2	1 No Setup confusion
Yates	South Central	2	NA
DeBakey High School of Health Professions	Alternative	1	Yes

Principals were unsure when the work was scheduled to be completed
No work on the next set of labs was done this summer
NA=No Response

APPENDIX C (CONTINUED)

LABORATORY COMPLETION SCHEDULES

School Name	Management District	Total Planned	Expected in 96–97	Total Ready 8/97
Technology Labs				
Austin	East	4	1	Yes
Bellaire	South West	4	4	Yes
Contemporary Learning Center	Alternative	1	1	Yes
Davis	North Central	6	2	Yes
Furr	East	4	1	Yes
Houston	North	4	1	Yes
Jones	South Central	4	2	1 Complete
Jordan	Alternative	1	1	Yes
Kashmere	North East	2	0	Yes
Lamar	Central	2	0	NA
Lee	West	1	0	Waiting connection
Madison	South	2	0	NA
Milby	South East	2	0 Software needed	Wiring needed
Reagan	North Central	0	1	Yes
Scarborough	Northwest	2	0	Yes
Sharpstown	West	1	1	Yes
Sterling	South	4	0	NA
Washington	Northwest	4	2	Yes
Waltrip	Northwest	2	1	No
Westbury	South West	4	2	NA
Wheatley	North East	2	1	NA
Worthing	South	1	1	No
Yates	South Central	3	1	NA
DeBakey High School of Health Professions	Alternative	1	0	NA

* The number of labs at each school was based upon principal response to a needs survey 3/95

Additional labs and support software was planned and provided by Vocational Education for Career and Technology courses.

Network wiring (Internet capability) was an additional cost and so was not part of the initial installation. With additional funding this will be completed.
NA=No Response

APPENDIX D
DEMOGRAPHICS OF STUDENTS IN SAMPLE POPULATION by Feeder Pattern Schools

Population Characteristics	Edison MS 1995–96		Austin HS 1996–97	
	n	%	n	%
1995–96 Eight Graders	495	100	229	100
Drop out	2	0.4		
Ethnicity				
Asian	0	0	1	0.4
African American	1	0.2	2	0.9
Hispanic	492	99.4	225	98.3
White	2	0.4	1	0.4
Gender				
Female	255	51.5	122	53.3
Male	240	48.5	107	46.7
Economic Indicator				
Free/Reduced Lunch	495	94	111	0.48
Special Programs				
Limited English Proficient	227	45.9	92	40.2
Special Education	53	10.7	30	13.1
End of Year Status				
Promoted	391	79	na	na
Retained	5	1	na	na
Placed	64	12.9	na	na

Population Characteristics	Burbank MS 1995–96		Houston HS 1996–97	
	n	%	n	%
1995–96 Eight Graders	480	100	313	100
Drop out	2	0.4	na	na
Ethnicity				
Asian	6	1.3	4	1.3
African American	46	9.6	16	5.1
Hispanic	394	82.1	272	86.9
White	34	7.1	21	6.7
Gender				
Female	246	51.2	158	50.5
Male	234	48.8	155	49.5
Economic Indicator				
Free/Reduced Lunch	266	0.6	119	0.38
Special Programs				
Limited English Proficient	131	27.3	90	28.8
Special Education	52	10.8	39	12.5
End of Year Status				
Promoted	403	84	na	na
Retained	46	9.6	na	na
Placed	1	0.2	na	na

APPENDIX D (CONTINUED)
DEMOGRAPHICS OF STUDENTS IN SAMPLE POPULATION by Feeder Pattern Schools

Population Characteristics	Hartman MS 1995–96		Jones HS 1996–97	
	n	%	n	%
1995–96 Eight Graders	486	100	147	100
Drop out	3	0.6	na	na
Ethnicity				
Asian	11	2.3	1	0.7
African American	183	37.7	27	18.4
Hispanic	271	55.6	111	75.5
White	21	4.3	8	5.4
Gender				
Female	227	46.7	68	46.3
Male	259	53.3	79	53.7
Economic Indicator				
Free/Reduced Lunch	170	35	31	0.21
Special Programs				
Limited English Proficient	96	19.8	46	31.3
Special Education	54	11.1	11	7.5
End of Year Status				
Promoted	272	56	na	na
Retained	2	0.4	na	na
Placed	144	29.6	na	na

Population Characteristics	Lanier MiS 1995–96		Lamar HS 1996–97	
	n	%	n	%
1995–96 Eight Graders	513	100	272	100
Drop out	2	0.4	na	na
Ethnicity				
Asian	21	4.1	10	3.7
African American	106	20.7	34	12.5
Hispanic	194	37.8	125	46
White	192	37.4	103	37.9
Gender				
Female	267	52	136	50
Male	246	48	136	50
Economic Indicator				
Free/Reduced Lunch	138	27	28	10
Special Programs				
Limited English Proficient	46	9	42	15.4
Special Education	23	4.5	16	5.9
End of Year Status				
Promoted	497	96.9	na	na
Retained	5	1	na	na
Placed	11	2.1	na	na

APPENDIX D (CONTINUED)
DEMOGRAPHICS OF STUDENTS IN SAMPLE POPULATION
by Feeder Pattern Schools

Population Characteristics	Revere MS 1995–96		Lee HS 1996–97	
	n	%	n	%
1995–96 Eight Graders	524	100	318	100
Drop out	4	0.8	na	na
Ethnicity				
Asian	35	6.7	19	6
African American	121	23.1	46	14.5
Hispanic	198	37.8	125	39.3
White	170	32.4	128	40.3
Gender				
Female	237	45.2	150	47.2
Male	287	54.8	168	52.8
Economic Indicator				
Free/Reduced Lunch	56	347	44	14
Special Programs				
Limited English Proficient	64	12.2	41	12.9
Special Education	54	10.3	41	12.9
End of Year Status				
Promoted	396	75.6	na	na
Retained	41	7.8	na	na
Placed	25	4.8	na	na